

Planning organization votes to pursue commuter rail line

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ROCKFORD —

Local planners have ratified an earlier decision to pursue a commuter rail line from Chicago through Belvidere to Rockford.

The Rockford Area Transportation Study, the area's metropolitan planning organization, on Thursday voted unanimously in favor of the route. A month ago, the RATS-backed Northern Illinois Commuter Transportation Initiative voted for the route over several other options.

Next, the planners will develop a proposal for the team that will oversee the new rail service and identify local funding sources — including possible property-tax referendums. Then they'll start a federally required environmental study. The project could be completed in three to five years, but will likely take longer.